Is your staff crippling your practice? Or are you crippling your staff?

By Sally McKenzie, CEO

Ignore it long enough and eventually the problem will take care of itself.

That’s the old look-the-other-way approach. Just pretend it’s not really a concern, and sooner or later those messy matters will just go away. If only that philosophy worked when dealing with employees. Actually it’s more likely that your staff — the good ones anyway — will just go away, and so too will a fair number of the patients, and then there are practice revenues that begin to dwindle as well. While the problems stay put, the profits are taking a pounding. And those “little issues” just keep piling up. Poor performance, conflict, staff vacancy after staff vacancy, stress, tension, etc. all just keep multiplying, but you keep telling yourself that it’s just a phase. Everything’s going to be fine. I’d like to agree with you, and tell you that you’re right, but you’re not.

Admittedly, staff issues are a major challenge. You rely on your employees to keep the practice running. You want to trust that they can and will operate in the best interests of the practice. All the more reason you need to look carefully at your team and ask yourself if you really do have confidence in them. Do you uphold the standard of excellence that you have committed yourself to?

Or has your practice become home base for those who simply go along to get along. No new ideas here. Change? Why would we want to do that? Aren’t things working just fine? What’s the problem with status quo? Bare minimum performance would be the modus operandi for this crew. But you don’t want to shake things up because Business Manager Carol knows the computers. She’s comfortable and isn’t going out of her way to strain her brain. She also hasn’t had a performance review since ... well, who can remember those things.

Needless to say, there’s not a lot of incentive for her to step it up, to improve efficiency, to look for ways to reduce costs and increase revenues. Npepe she’s just there warming the chair and, as far as she’s concerned, the dentist should be happy she does that so well. Comfortable Carol sets the tone for the entire staff. They see what she does, or rather, doesn’t do. “If she can sit up there and do practically nothing all day, why should I work so hard?” It’s the “bare minimum mindset.”

You simply cannot afford to ignore staffing issues. They never just go away. They become deeper and more divisive. The results then begin to manifest themselves in poor patient relations and, ultimately, lower profits.

The good news is that most employees sincerely want to perform well. Yes, the Comfortable Carols and never-do-more-than-the-minimum staffs are out there, but most employees — the ones you want to keep — want to be challenged. They want to feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves. And if you’ll invest some time and resources to guide your team members, you’ll be the first to enjoy the pay off of better performance and higher productivity. What’s more, you will learn very quickly if Comfortable Carol and the rest of this lackluster crew are committed to poor performance or if they are simply in need of direction and guidance from you. Here’s how.

Don’t just fill the position

I know it’s nerve-racking to have a vacancy or two in your practice, but curf the urge to hire any warm body off the street. Make sure the person you are considering is right for the position before she is another name on your payroll. Computerized Internet testing tools, such as those available through McKenzie Management, allow you to assess applicants to determine who would be the best match for both the job and the practice.

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Don’t leave them hanging

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